

November 22, 2020  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: 1 Thessalonians  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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## SELF-SACRIFICING SERVICE 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

How do you tell someone that he or she is wrong without offending them? That sounds like an impossible task. No one likes to be corrected. No one wants to have a peer or even a boss point out that they are doing the job incorrectly or making mistakes. This is such an issue that the Human Resources office is often the busiest place in many companies. In our day especially, there is an attitude that no one has the right to tell another person that they are wrong. Unless, of course, it is a case of a pagan telling Christians to keep their archaic, caveman dogma to themselves.

That brings up the question about how to tell the good news of salvation to a person who is living in sin, enjoying living in sin, and really thinks that “religion” is a personal issue. It is pretty common to experience a negative response to your attempt to tell a sinner that he or she needs to change. They are often pretty sure that how they live their lives is none of your business. They are convinced that the many thousands of religions or sects all offer ways to get to heaven. In our day, there is a growing number of people who are convinced that there is no heaven, no hell, and no God who controls both. To them “science” is the answer to everything, and it is certainly more trustworthy than your “fire and brimstone” message about escaping hell.

How do we help people like that? Actually, people are not all that different from age-to-age throughout history. The philosophers Paul addressed on Mars Hill in Athens sounded a lot like our coworkers, neighbors, and secular college professors. Probably the citizens of ancient Thessalonica were by nature reticent to embrace the doctrine that Paul had been preaching in the local synagogue.

In this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica several months after he had been forced out of town by those who didn't like the good news, he offers us some good pointers on how to share the gospel and how to help Christians grow. In the short time that Paul and the team were in Thessalonica, they established a sterling example of how Christ's messengers should conduct themselves. That Paul was able to appeal to this example indicates the kind of impression he left on the new converts to Christ. These simple characteristics make good points for us to emulate as we endeavor to be channels of Christ's good news to needy sinners and maturing saints. Their ministry was characterized by . . .

### **Affectionate Attitude (vv.7-8).**

The affection Paul, Silas, and Timothy showed to the people in Thessalonica was gentle like a mother toward her baby. Paul reminded them that *we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children (v.7)*. What does that look like? Is it really possible for us to be like that?

The nature of this gentleness can easily be contrasted with the attitude of the false teachers that sets the context of this statement. Look back a few verses and realize that the messengers' gentleness was revealed with no teaching rooted in error or impurity (2:3). They made no attempt to deceive (2:3). There was no attempt to please people instead of God (2:4). They offered no flattery (2:5) and no seeking of human glory (2:6).

Furthermore, on a positive note, the messengers were as innocent and harmless as little babies. The Greek word behind the English word **gentle** actually creates a point of controversy. Some texts have the word *eipioi*, which means to be gentle. But most of the ancient Greek texts have the word *neipioi*, which refers to infants or babies. One can easily see how a scribe could insert or leave out the letter that sounds like our “n.” And there is not all that much difference in meaning between the two words.

In light of the immediate context, which is a contrast with the false teachers who came with wrong motives, it is likely this statement affirms that Paul, Silas, and Timothy came to the people with kindness, compassion, gentleness. That idea would fit with

Paul's instruction to Timothy: *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil (2 Timothy 2:24).*

However, at the same time, it is likely that the messengers of the gospel need to be innocent, pure, without an agenda. We need to be like babies nestled in their loving mother's arms – the picture of gentleness.

But that kindness and gentleness is not the same as weakness and timidity that never points out a problem or is afraid to offend a sinner who is living in sin. For example, think of the instruction, the commands that this gentle mother-like teacher gave to these new Christians. In the second letter, Paul wrote, *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us (2 Thessalonians 3:6). For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:10-11). If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:14).* Those are pretty direct statements to which the guilty parties would conclude that the messengers were not all that gentle. But at the same time, the messenger of the gospel must be kind and compassionate enough to warn those who were walking outside God's boundaries.

Gentleness is good because there is a great need for it. We are trying to rescue slaves from slavery to sin who are quite unaware of their pitiful condition. We are attempting to pull burning sticks out of the fire who don't know they are sticks, don't know they are on fire, and don't want to be disturbed. In short, to tell a person the wonderful news of the gospel is to say to the person, "At this point in life you are wrong – dead wrong." Folks generally are not very favorable toward correction from strangers or friends. Gentleness goes a long way in tempering that painful reality.

Where there is an attitude of gentleness, there will be a sharing of truth out of love. That is the expression of the attitude of affection. Again, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he and the team were characterized as, *Being affectionately desirous of you (v.8a).* The

motivating attitude in the gospel-tellers was deep affection for the people.

The Greek word for our word *affectionately* is rare. In fact, this is the only place we find it in the entire New Testament. The word is even scarce in secular Greek. One significant appearance of the word was on a tombstone where a mother expressed her deep affection for a child that passed away. That gives us a good idea of how deep this feeling was. The idea behind this word well describes David's affection for God (LXX). *A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE WAS IN THE WILDERNESS OF JUDAH. O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).*

That makes us wonder, what intrinsic characteristic could a sinful person have that would make us messengers of the good news affectionately desire them? Our God and Savior loves them. He said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). And then He told us to love them like He does. *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well (James 2:8).* Where there is no affection for the sinner, there will be little motivation to tell them the way of escape from hell that God has provided.

Conversely, where there is affection for the lost, there will also be the outworking of that affection. And so Paul could confess, *We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (v.8b).* To share is to take from what I have and give you some of it. Obviously, we have the gospel and should be ready and happy to give it to those in need.

What do we share when we share the gospel? We explain the sinner's need for the Savior because of personal sin. We reveal the amazing truth about forgiveness of sin, how God picks up the sinner's sin and removes the judicial guilt forever. We tell the good news of justification by faith. We tell about the miracle of regeneration, being born again through grace. We explain sanctification, how God instantly takes us from being His enemy and sets us into His family.

The gospel story is so much more than "a free ticket into heaven." The gospel is not a corpus of knowledge that I am smart

enough to know. Rather, the gospel is a possession of God that He has entrusted to me. We must agree with the apostle when he wrote, *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy*” (1Corinthians 4:1-2).

And more than sharing the good news, we must be willing to share ourselves. That speaks of opening up, becoming vulnerable as we relate what God has done and is doing in our lives. It speaks of sacrifice of time and energy which are necessary as we build redemptive relationships.

Why would we want to make sacrifices like that? The motivation for affection is that *you had become very dear to us* (v.8b). The Greek word behind our word dear (*agapeittoi*) is the same special word God the Father used to describe God the Son at His baptism (Matthew 3:17) and transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). He called God the Son, “My beloved Son.” Paul confessed that the now redeemed sinners in Thessalonica had become very dear to him and his co-workers. This is not a feeling we manufacture toward others but is the expression of the love that God has for these people. We should be able to process the love God had for us when we were still His enemies and transfer that to our relationship with the sinner.

That kind of affection will lead to activity flowing from sacrificial love. Therefore, in the case of the gospel messenger, their ministry is characterized by . . .

### **Laborious Actions (vv.9-10).**

Obviously, this idea speaks of hard labor. In the case of Paul’s evangelistic team, the Lord’s servants worked night and day. *For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you* (v.9a). Do we labor and toil? This was a very practical matter for Paul and the team. In his second letter to this church Paul reminded them, *Nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate* (2 Thessalonians 3:8-9).

Are we willing to labor intensely in order to demonstrate our affection for sinners and new Christians alike? Do we sacrifice in order not to be a burden to others? If we shirk our responsibilities in the Body of Christ, someone else will have to do extra work.

In the “it’s-all-about-me” age, it is very difficult to find people who are willing to sacrifice for the “Lord’s work.” Part of the problem is that for many years, too many pastors have pressured and guilted people into making serious financial, hourly, physical sacrifices in order to build a monument for the pastor. After awhile people catch on to what the real goal is and back off. Couple those bad experiences with the “me-first-and-only” attitude of our age, and it is no wonder that people are not even willing to sacrifice a few hours a week to meet with fellow believers on Wednesday evening and Sunday evening to encourage each other to love and good works. If professing believers can’t sacrifice to build up friends, they are not going to make a sacrifice to tell the good news to God’s enemy!

It is a case of misplaced affection. We are to have affection for God first and others second. Too many have embraced the world’s philosophy that affection is reserved for self only!

In the case of our text, we learn that the Lord’s servants not only sacrificed to earn their own keep, but at the same time they also proclaimed the gospel. They worked physically, *while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God* (v.9b). The words teach us that we may have to make the physical sacrifice in order to get the opportunity for the gospel. We need to be ready to set aside a few minutes on the spur of the moment when the opportunity presents itself. Or we also need to plan to build redemptive relationships.

Building those kinds of relationships takes time and energy. We find it easy to neglect telling the good news because we are so busy. There is no question that we are busy people. The question is whether the things we are busy with are necessary or even good.

Our discipline to work as we must and at the same time tell the good news demonstrates controlled living. People in Thessalonica witnessed that from the messengers. Paul admitted that, *You are witnesses, and God also* (v.10). The people observed that what Paul claimed was true. Likewise, our world is watching to see if we have any affection for them. New believers are watching to learn how to live in obedience to their Savior.

What did the people witness in the messengers of the gospel? They saw *how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers (v.10)*. Oh! It was not just that the people saw that the gospel messengers made sacrifices. They also saw that these people were really different, maybe odd. You do not have to adopt the sins of the sinner in order to show God's love to him or her. A holy, righteous, blameless lifestyle will go far to help a sinner understand that he or she is not measuring up to God's plan.

Furthermore, how much more would it help new Christians (see the words *you believers*) understand how to "walk worthy of the Lord"? Part of the reason for us to "hang out" with fellow Christians is to be like iron that sharpens iron. Solomon concluded that, *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17)*. When we have established our willingness to sacrifice to help others, then we can have a ministry that is characterized by . . .

### **Fatherly Exhortation (vv11-12).**

When you have manifested genuine concern, a concern backed up by sacrificial labor, you should have opportunity to challenge brothers and sisters to walk in a manner worthy of God. Notice the picture used to describe this attitude behind teaching other Christians. *For you know how, like a father with his children (v.11)*.

Our ministry of building up others needs to be like a father's relationship with his children. This picture is similar to the mother-with-infant picture in verse seven. This would be a picture with which 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians were familiar, not 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. The role of the father in that time was to teach his children. Much of the time the next generation would continue the family business or line or work. Farmer fathers trained their sons to be farmers, tailors trained sons to be tailors, merchants trained sons to be merchants and so on. The major role of father was to teach children how to be what they should be.

The people Paul rubbed shoulders with observed it in him and his fellow-laborers. They knew from observing that father/child relationship. No doubt some of them knew from experience in the father/child relationship with Paul. A good word for this is mentoring or disciple-making. We can't expect new Christians to come into an

assembly of mature Christians and suddenly know what they know and act like they act. Someone needs to make the sacrifice to come alongside other Christians and teach them what God has planned for them. How do we do that?

Verse twelve unpacks a description of the actions of the father and child teaching relationship. Paul reminded them, *We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you (v.12a)*. Mark chose these words: exhorted, encouraged, and charged.

Exhortation means to call someone alongside and, thereby, encourage them. It is a matter of you putting an arm around their shoulder in a spiritual sense and saying, "We can do this together. We can make this work." Most important, it is to keep calling them alongside the Bible as you teach and illustrate how it works in life.

Encouragement is very similar to exhortation. This word can be translated "admonish" and often is. However, the word admonish often sounds a bit negative, like you are trying to tell someone what to do. But the Greek word here has a form much like the previous word (call alongside) so that it means to speak what is useful and helpful in an encouraging way. It might be like saying, "You will find this practice very helpful. I think we can work on this area in your life," as opposed to "You better do this or else!"

To charge actually comes from the word that means to testify as one would do in court. It is to give testimony to truth, or to be able to explain how this truth has worked in your life. Personal example goes a long way toward teaching and encouraging others. It is to get out front and lead rather than get behind and push.

So what do these three actions look like in real life? Near the end of this study we will run into a great illustration of father to child instruction. *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:14-22)*. That is a whole lot of instruction!

The goal of this kind of instruction is to help the believer learn how to live in a worthy manner, or as Paul stated it, *To walk in a*

*manner worthy of God (v.12b)*. Our instruction is not an attempt to tell people how to live their lives. It is to teach on the authority of God's Word how to live in a way worthy of God's character and God's calling.

It is a matter of teaching others to live like God who has called you out. We are learning to live in the manner of God, *Who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (v.12c)*. We must all teach each other to live worthy of God who calls you into His glory. You are now a citizen of His kingdom because He has removed you (in the spiritual and eternal sense) from the kingdom of this world that will be destroyed. We call that immediate sanctification. Conversely, learning to live as a citizen in God's kingdom is progressive sanctification. That is how the letter ends: *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:14-22)*.

God gives us the perfect, pure truth of the gospel, which includes the whole teaching of the Bible. God has poured out His love into our hearts. God instructs us to take that truth He gave us, motivated by the love He gave us, to tell others the good news. God expects us to encourage, teach, challenge each other to live worthy of God's glory. Can we conclude that the Christian life is a relational life? And relationships require sacrifice.